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ABSTRACT

This program guide is based on two handbooks developed by the Departments of Education in Ohio and New Jersey, each of which was used to help local school districts comply with state requirements for parent involvement programs. Primary components include the following: day and evening workshops for parents as tutors; full-time community coordinators available to parents at all times; active parent advisory councils with regular parent participation; and systematic inclusion of outside community organizations in parent training components. Various components of program development are discussed, including needs assessment, goal setting, implementation, and program monitoring. Needs assessment includes obtaining (1) information on such things as language background of students and their parents, cultural values and practices of different linguistic groups; and parents' attitudes and work schedules; and (2) information on parents' concerns and interests, for which a Parent Survey and Assessment Profile are included. Program goals and strategies are discussed in terms of communicating with parents, parent development, and parent leadership. Ways to monitor and evaluate the program are suggested. Various questionnaires, log forms, a sample letter, and an outline of informational meeting plans are included in this document. (LB)

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ORIGINAL

PARENT INVOLVEMENT: A RESOURCE FOR THE EDUCATION OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

ED337036

Compiled by Rudy Careaga

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This Program Information Guide is based on *A Manual for Encouraging Parent-Community Involvement in Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language Programs*, developed by the Ohio Department of Education, and *Effective Practices for Successful Bilingual Parent Involvement Programs: An Administrators Handbook*, developed by the New Jersey State Department of Education.

Both sets of guidelines were used to help local school districts comply with state requirements for parent involvement programs. Federal requirements, as outlined in the Bilingual Education Act, were also addressed. Outstanding features of programs based on these guidelines include:

- day and evening workshops for parents as tutors,
- full-time community coordinators available to parents at all times,
- active parent advisory councils with regular parent participation as high as 73 percent, and
- systematic inclusion of outside community organizations in parent training components.

All programs reported that parents successfully participated as home tutors, classroom volunteers, or bilingual/ESL program evaluators.

INTRODUCTION

Schools can greatly increase the effectiveness of their bilingual education and English as a second language (ESL) programs by including a parent involvement component. Teachers benefit from parent participation programs as their efforts to educate limited English proficient (LEP) students are reinforced at home. Offering language minority parents a significant role in their children's schooling also helps program administrators develop and implement more appropriate strategies. Knowledgeable, motivated parents are also a valuable resource to provide help in classrooms, libraries, and other school programs. Parent involvement also directly benefits the students and parents themselves. Some LEP students experience a sense of conflict between their home and school cultures; if schools and parents are communicating effectively, this can be reduced. For parents with limited English proficiency, participating in a program at their children's school can provide an excellent introduction to American society and increase their awareness of other community services available to them.

It is important to remember that schools receiving Title VII funds to provide special language services (those provided by the federal government under the Bilingual Education Act) are obligated to inform parents of the instructional goals of the program and their children's progress (Cubillos 1988). This can provide a starting point for a parent participation program. For many parents of LEP students, however, involvement may be hindered by

language barriers, limited schooling, different cultural norms, or a lack of information. These are some of the challenges teachers and administrators must face in implementing parent involvement programs in their schools or districts. Careful planning is required to meet these challenges, creating a viable program of parent involvement.

This guide suggests effective practices in implementing such a program. It is designed for use by bilingual or ESL program directors and teachers, school principals, and other staff who work with LEP students and their parents. Various components of program development – needs assessment, goal setting, implementation, and program monitoring – are discussed .

ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF PROGRAM FAMILIES

A parent involvement program can be effective only if it addresses the needs of the community which it serves. Program planners can ascertain these needs by learning about the parents' backgrounds, concerns, and interests. Understanding these factors will help ensure that the program provides relevant services, responds to widespread interests, and makes use of the valuable resources parents can bring to the program.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background information provides program planners with a general context in which to set program goals. Do certain characteristics of the parent indicate the need for support services in a particular area? Can program planners expect a large number of parents to provide instructional assistance to students?

Some important background factors that should be identified in an initial assessment are:

Language background of students and their parents. Once language background has been identified, bilingual liaisons or community workers can be used to make contact with parents, if appropriate.

Cultural values and practices of different linguistic groups. A basic knowledge of various cultures represented in the school is essential to avoid unintentional cultural conflicts. Information on religious holidays or observances, cultural celebrations, and family structures should be obtained.

Parents' attitudes. Parents of minority language students often have a deep reverence toward the school. In some cultures, teachers and administrators are highly respected professionals, and some parents may be uncertain of how to respond when the program encourages their involvement in school activities.

Work schedules of the parents. Meeting times should be scheduled when the most parents can attend. If parents work during the day, meetings should

be held in the evening. In other cases, parents may be home during the day and find it more convenient to come to meetings at the beginning or end of the school day.

Child care needs. Many parents will need babysitting services (probably at the school itself) to be able to attend meetings and other program functions.

Length of expected residence in the school district. If the community to be served is highly mobile, program objectives will have to be short-term.

INFORMATION ON CONCERNS AND INTERESTS

Assessing minority language parents' concerns and interests will help program planners set specific objectives for parent participation. Important questions regarding parents' concerns and interests that should be covered in the initial assessment are:

Parents' concern about their childrens' academic performance. Some parents do not feel capable of monitoring their childrens' progress through traditional channels of home-school communications such as report cards, progress reports, and parent-teacher conferences.

Parents' knowledge or concern about bilingual education and ESL instruction. Many parents are unfamiliar with these programs and may have questions regarding its effectiveness or necessity for their children.

Parents' ability and willingness to become involved in the school's decision-making processes. Provided with adequate information and opportunities, many parents are eager to become part of school committees and meetings.

Parents' ability and willingness to provide instructional assistance to their children at home and at school. With proper support, parents can act as home tutors and classroom volunteers.

Parents' willingness to assist in non-instructional school services. Many parents have skills and resources that are useful in school administrative functions, such as typing, drawing, supervising, translating, interpreting, and providing child-care.

Parents' interest in their childrens' school as a source for their own educational advancement. Through adult ESL and vocational programs, schools can engage the interest and participation of LEP parents.

A parent survey form, such as the sample shown in Figure 1, can be an effective way to obtain comprehensive information on the target parent population. Such a survey may need to be conducted in the parents' home language and must be sensitive to their cultural norms.

Figure 1

PARENT SURVEY

Sample Questionnaire

We want to provide the best school program for possible to your child. To do that, we need you to be an important part of it. We would like to know more about your family, how you feel about the program, and the kind of information you would like us to provide about the school. With this information, we can improve the way we work with you. You can help us develop the program by answering the following questions.

Parent Names _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Children's Names _____ Grade/Age _____

_____ Grade/Age _____

_____ Grade/Age _____

A. Basic Information Questions

1. How long have you lived in the U.S.? _____
2. What language do you generally speak at home with your children? _____ With your spouse? _____
3. Do you have a job? _____
4. What is the most convenient time for you to visit school or come to a meeting? _____
5. What level of education have you completed? Elementary _____ High School _____ College/University _____
6. If you wanted to participate in school activities, what times would be preferable for you?

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Mornings					
Afternoons					
Evenings					

7. To participate in parent which activities, would you prefer? (Check all that apply)

_____ on-site babysitting

_____ a neighbor to accompany you

_____ transportation

_____ an interpreter

Figure 1 (Continued)

B. Bilingual/ESL Program

1.	Do you know what the purpose of the bilingual/ESL program is?	Yes	No
2.	Do you feel the program is helping your child in:		
	reading?	Yes	No
	mathematics?	Yes	No
	English?	Yes	No
3.	Have you ever met with your child's teacher?	Yes	No
4.	Have you ever attended any bilingual/ESL parent meetings?	Yes	No

C. Interests

Would you like to participate in a parent-school program to learn more about:

1.	the purpose of bilingual education?	Yes	No
2.	what your child learns in school?	Yes	No
3.	how to help your child with schoolwork?	Yes	No
4.	volunteering to help in the classroom?	Yes	No
5.	school decision-making activities?	Yes	No
6.	how the American schools are different from your native country's schools?	Yes	No
7.	community resources services avilable?	Yes	No

Would you like to:

8.	visit your child's classes?	Yes	No
9.	come to school for a meeting to learn more about the program?	Yes	No
10.	volunteer in the classroom?	Yes	No
11.	participate on a parent advisory committee?	Yes	No
12.	talk to other parents about the program?	Yes	No

An effective program requires that schools gain a complete, accurate picture of the population to be served; implement a variety of projects that address the needs of the school, the students,and their parents; and monitor the program to ensure it is achieving the stated goals. At every step in this process, schools must be sensitive to minority language parents and their needs and concerns. For example, conducting a survey of parents is an effective way to gather information about parents of students in special language programs. However, such a survey must be presented in an understandable and non-threatening manner. Language minority parents often

hold the school in high esteem and feel surprised or even intimidated when asked to provide information about themselves or their opinions on how school programs should be implemented. Presenting all information in a linguistically and culturally sensitive fashion is critical to an effective parent participation program.

The survey can also be used to provide information to the parents. For example, if the interviewer learns a parent does not understand the purpose of the bilingual or ESL program, he or she can explain it and encourage the parent to attend a meeting to learn more.

After the survey is complete, schools can compile appropriate data for programming decisions. Figure 2 contains a sample data sheet.

Figure 2

ASSESSMENT PROFILE

Parent Name _____

Child Name _____

Complete the grid below to ascertain the numbers of interested parents by topics and similarities.

Children's Age	under 5	5-7	8-11	12-15	15+
Grade Levels	pre-K	K	1-5	6-8	9-12
Length of Residence	less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	more than 10 years	

Preferred Time for Meeting	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning					
Afternoon					
Evening					

Interest Areas	General Information	Parents as Tutor/Learner	Community Services	Active Participation in PAC

PROGRAM GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Once parents' backgrounds, concerns, and interests have been identified, program developers can set program goals and select implementation strategies. Remember that some parents will be eager to participate from the start, others less so. By making programs both as relevant and convenient as possible, participation can be maximized.

The following section discusses sample goals and corresponding strategies that may be implemented within any school setting or parent community.

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

An important issue that may determine many parents' involvement in school programs is their perceptions of school personnel and educational institutions. Are parents made to feel welcome at the school? Are they encouraged to contact teachers or other school personnel with questions or concerns? How often are they invited to attend various school functions? By addressing these questions and others, a link may be established for more substantive parent-school interaction.

To increase parent participation in school programs and activities through enhanced communication with school personnel, the following strategies should be implemented.

Make a positive first impression. The first contact most parents have with the school is when they enroll their children in the school. School staff should make the parents feel as comfortable as possible. A bilingual staff member should be available. The school secretary or attendance clerk should be pleasant and make the parents feel welcome when enrolling their children. Parents often come to the school with as many apprehensions as their children. Therefore, school staff should make extra efforts to accommodate and welcome these parents.

Maintain positive communication with parents. Parents of LEP students often escort their younger children to and from school. Teachers and administrators should use this opportunity to talk with the parents informally.

Communicate directly with parents. Informal meetings with parents can provide additional encouragement to parents, especially those who are not literate in English and cannot read written notes and announcements sent home with their children.

Familiarize parents with school buildings and system. Holding a Special Open House or Back-to-School Night for LEP parents is an excellent way to introduce parents to the school. Once the date for the Open House is set, notices in the native language should be sent to parents and a bilingual staff member should follow up with phone calls. Parents can meet teachers and tour school facilities in relatively small groups with interpreters. School policies can be explained and parents can be encouraged to visit the school, observe classes, and become involved in extracurricular activities.

Provide frequent and flexible opportunities for parent conferences. The parent-teacher conference is one of the most important contacts the school has with parents. It provides parents and teachers with the opportunity to share information about the student's progress and goals. Conferences should emphasize positive aspects of a student's performance, not only difficulties. See Figure 3 for suggested topics for discussion.

Promote and provide frequent opportunities for school visits. Parent visits should be scheduled for special events. These visits may coincide with holidays of cultural importance not usually celebrated by Anglo-American schools. A cultural day in the classroom is another possibility. Parents generally enjoy seeing their children perform and may be willing to contribute to a special program by bringing a favorite native dish.

Parents should be encouraged to visit the class whenever possible. A well-publicized visitation policy promotes a sense of partnership and pride in the school.

Figure 3

TOPICS FOR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Information which the teacher can provide to the parent:

- the child's academic and social behavior at school;
- areas of strength and weakness in various subjects;
- independent and guided work habits;
- relationships with teachers and other students;
- self discipline and response to teacher authority;
- response to the rules of reward and punishment in school;
- ideas to help their child's academic performance;
- school policy on discipline;
- the need for parental cooperation to help both in and out of the classroom; and
- the important role that parents play in the early learning years.

Information which the parent can provide to the teacher:

- activities they do not want their child to participate in;
- how much time is spent with the child in family activities;
- their expectations for the child at school;
- the type of discipline the child responds to;
- the child's interests and hobbies;
- daily activities, television habits, children's games; and
- the child's general behavior at home.

Santa Cruz Bilingual Education Design. *A Teacher Training System Component; Parent and Community Involvement.* University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, 1980.

PARENT DEVELOPMENT

Positive communication between the school and parents can motivate parents to become involved in their children's education. It is necessary, therefore, to be able to provide these parents with the means to become involved with the school. A school or district involvement effort should

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include support to parents by providing them with useful information and training.

To train and motivate parents to participate in school programs and activities, a school can employ the following strategies:

Reduce language barriers to parent participation by establishing an ESL program for parents. When parents learn English, they set a good example for their children, increase their own confidence and abilities, and better understand their childrens' school experiences. Program planners must remember the long-term commitment of personnel and resources this requires; to be effective, ESL instruction must be offered on a regular basis.

Provide regularly scheduled informational meetings. Informational meetings can provide parents with essential background about available community services. See Figure 4 for sample meeting plans.

Provide training in child development. Parents are often eager to learn how to help their children adjust to schools in the U.S. Parents affect their children's growth and development by: (1) the way they communicate with their children; (2) the variety and meaning of the experiences they provide for their children; and (3) the way they guide their children in developing social skills. A parent training component can focus on ways that this interaction can be positive and contribute to school success. Outside consultants could be called upon to provide this training.

Train parents in instructional techniques and methodologies. Parents should be provided with suggestions for learning activities or lessons that they can carry out with their children at home. The skills reinforced by such activities and their purpose should be discussed with parents. Parents can also provide this kind of assistance in the classroom. In some school districts, parents are asked to help develop curriculum materials about the children's native culture. Many parents are glad to bring in pictures and artifacts from their native land. They can also be called upon to teach native songs, poems, dances, and folk tales.

Organize employment awareness meetings. Parents may request information on job training programs. Program administrators should explore community resources for job training and coordinate efforts with other service providers to organize a job training component.

PARENT LEADERSHIP

Making the transition from recipient of services to active planner and decision-maker may make some parents anxious. However, the preceding strategies enhance parents' development and knowledge base to facilitate this transition. Parent leadership and involvement in their childrens' education can be stimulated through an organized parent advisory council or committee (PAC). When a school district applies for a Title VII grant, the grant must be developed in consultation with an advisory council, of which the majority of members must be parents and other representatives of children to be served

Figure 4

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL MEETING PLANS

GOAL 1: To orient the parents to the American school system. Parents will become aware of some of the major differences between schools in their native land and the U.S. system. Special emphasis will be on the importance of the role of parent involvement in American schools.

	OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	MATERIALS/RESOURCES
1.	Inform parents about activities in a regular school day	Show parents a slide presentation of several classes participatingin a variety of school activities. Discuss the objectives of these activities.	Slide presentation, samples of student work
2.	Familiarize parents with the similarities and differences between schools in the U.S. and their native countries.	Discuss the differences in structure of program, focus of activities and increased role of parent interacting with school staff.	Comparative chart
3.	Orient parents to the idea of closer interaction with school staff.	Inform parents of their role in education and how increased interaction with the school helps to develop better programs.	Parent handbook, report cards, student folders

GOAL 2: To encourage parents to reinforce and extend children's native language skills through activities in the home. Parents will become acquainted with the importance of developing strong native language skills and learn how to provide experiences which promote the development of these skills in the home.

	OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	MATERIALS/RESOURCES
1.	Inform parents of the importance of developing strong native language skills.	Invite parents to a meeting at which discussion will focus on benefits of strong native language skill development, both through demonstration lessons of skill transfer and through discussion.	Manipulative needed for language lesson, tape recorder, fact sheet
2.	Identify for parents some games, songs, and play activities that are appropriate for children to promote skills devlopment.	Invite parents to an open house. Parents will be able to preview books and records and try out equipment which can be borrowed and used in the home for further native language skill development.	Song sheets, games, books, toys, and other manipulatives that can be used in the home
3.	Teach parents how to apply basic principles of learning discussed for home activities such as story-reading/telling.	Present a demonstration of simple activities and story-telling techniques, that employ basic principles that parents can follow in the home.	School library books, pictures, magazines, children's drawings

in the program (Cubillos 1988). Even after parents join a PAC, they may need training to become effective participants. Training should address the following questions:

- How does a committee function?
- What is the role of a member?
- What are the correct procedures for conducting meetings?
- What is expected of a committee member?
- Is attendance important?
- What information can and should be made available to members?
- How does the committee's work co-ordinate with the district-wide school system?

Once the advisory committee has been established and members understand their roles, they can become involved in planning, implementing and evaluating bilingual and ESL programs. To advise the district administrators in these areas, parents must have information on the following topics:

- the goals of the program;
- federal and/or state regulations governing the program;
- who are the children to be served;
- the identification and placement processes;
- instructional techniques recommended;
- the organization of the program and services available;
- courses available at the various educational levels;
- supplemental and auxiliary services available to program participants;
- evaluation results; and
- curricular expectations for the children in various courses and grade levels.

The advisory committee may also identify their own concerns and discussion topics. Other suggestions may be provided by district administrators. Parents can discuss and advise the schools on matters such as the appropriateness of native language materials, evaluation of the program, and variables that affect the evaluation design. If it is given the opportunity and is appropriately trained, the parent advisory committee can become a viable force in developing an effective program of bilingual/ESL education.

Regularly scheduled meetings of the PAC should be made known to the parent community well in advance and should be announced in neighborhood newspapers. Also, the date and place of the meeting should be posted clearly in stores and other public places frequented by parents. A sample letter is displayed in Figure 5. This letter should be translated into the home languages of the students as appropriate. Follow-up confirmation of the receipt of the letter and a response is recommended.

Figure 5

SAMPLE MEETING NOTIFICATION LETTER

Date

Dear Parent(s) of _____,

As the Director of Bilingual/ESL program for (*your city*) Public Schools, I am happy to invite you to our first district-wide meeting of parents of children in the bilingual/ESL program sponsored by the (*your city*) Parent Advisory Council (PAC). The meeting will take place at _____ School at _____ p.m. on November ___, 19___. Since Puerto Rican Discovery Day is November 19th, we will take this opportunity to celebrate by having bilingual/ESL program students discuss the importance of this date as well as presenting songs and dances of Puerto Rico. At the same time, district administrators and I will discuss services available to you, the goals and benefits of (*your city*) Bilingual Program and the role of you and your child(ren) in the schools.

I hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

Director, Bilingual Program

MONITORING PROGRAM'S SUCCESS

As parents increase their involvement, they may shift from one role to another and develop new interests, or different concerns. The effectiveness of a parent involvement program relies in part on its ability to adapt to these changes in order to maintain and increase parent involvement. Program planners can ensure that the program remains flexible and successful by monitoring its activities.

Program administrators must monitor to ascertain that:

- planned activities meet parent needs;
- the level of involvement has increased; and
- parents are better informed about the bilingual or ESL program.

Ideally, these questions should be answered "yes" at the end of the program. In addition to specific post-program evaluation methods, information about program effectiveness should be gathered throughout the year. Teachers, program administrators, and parents should all participate in the ongoing evaluation of the parent involvement program. Some effective methods for

monitoring the parent involvement program include logs of parent volunteers or participants; informal observation by teachers, principals, or the coordinator; interviews with parents; and survey evaluations.

Logs. A record file can be maintained on each parent volunteer. This file should indicate when the individuals started work, what type of activity they were assigned, their schedule, and basic information such as name, address, and telephone number. This log will help the coordinator decide whether a volunteer has participated on an intermittent or continuous basis. It might also suggest future roles for that volunteer. See Figure 6 for a sample log form.

Informal Observation. Principals and classroom teachers can observe parents who volunteer in school libraries, classrooms, or playgrounds. The coordinator also has an excellent chance to observe parent volunteers who work in the school or who help with organizing social and cultural events. The observations determine areas in which parents might need more training.

Observation should be used to determine parents' strengths and weaknesses and provide assistance for improvement. Generally, observation should not be used to screen out parents because all parents who wish to participate should be encouraged.

Interviews. Classroom teachers or the coordinator should schedule periodic interviews with parent and community volunteers (especially those who act as tutors or aides) to evaluate how well specific tasks are being performed. Immediate feedback should be provided during interviews and special care should be taken to make them as non-threatening as possible. Parents should be encouraged to ask questions and volunteer suggestions to improve services.

Surveys. A written evaluation can be administered to parent volunteers at a specific time. These surveys should be written in the parents' languages to solicit their opinions about the parent program.

FORMAL PROGRAM EVALUATION

An external consultant who is skilled in program evaluation techniques can be contracted to review the program's operations and to make recommendations. Many school districts use such consultants when conducting their final annual evaluation. However, they can be brought in early in the year to assist the coordinator, as well as other teachers, in designing an evaluation plan which will adequately and accurately measure parent participation. These staff members later could train parents in evaluation techniques. It might also be useful to bring in a consultant midway through the year to review the program's operation and to make recommendations for improvement before the year ends. Consultants should at that time be able to view actual operations and, naturally, should have access to all files and documents.

Figure 6

PARENT LOG FORM

Parent: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Teacher: _____

Grade Level: _____

Program: _____

Starting Date: _____

Ending Date: _____

I. Please attach daily/weekly entries describing the volunteer services/participation of the parent. Each entry should include the following information:

- specific tasks assigned to parent,
- time allocated for activity,
- outcome of activities, and
- general observation (parent enthusiasm, student reactions).

II. General Evaluation (Please rate parents at the end of the program/year.)

1.	Has the parent participated according to schedule agreed upon	Yes	No
2.	Is the parent generally effective in carrying out tasks?	Yes	No
3.	Does the parent consistently display high level of interest/initiative?	Yes	No
4.	Has the parent increased level of participation?	Yes	No
5.	Do you feel the parent should change area of involvement?	Yes	No
6.	Do you feel the parent should change level of involvement?	Yes	No
7.	Do you feel the parent would benefit from further training?	Yes	No

III. Comments/Recommendations

Signature _____
(Position)

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CONCLUSION

Parent involvement in education provides a unique opportunity for parents to grow in their roles as teachers; they have an opportunity to help their children learn at home and possibly at school. Parents and school personnel thus become partners in the education of children. LEP students, despite obstacles imposed by language and culture, stand to increase their academic achievement, increase their involvement in the mainstream culture, and generally become more goal-oriented and motivated students.

As partners, parents and administrators can also gain much from each other. Parents of LEP students, frequently unfamiliar with many of the institutions of American society, can become acquainted with the educational system as a means of social and economic advancement for themselves and for their children. A parent involvement program may include language training for parents as well as skills development in such areas as child-rearing and employment awareness. As discussed previously, participation in organized parent councils or committees provides parents with an opportunity to become involved in the mainstream of American society.

Teachers and school administrators, well-trained in the areas of curriculum development, instructional methods and techniques, and often in child psychology, stand to learn new ways of relating to all children and their parents, especially those from distant countries or very distinct backgrounds from their own. Additionally, teachers and school administrators find new ways to understand parents, and by extension the community, as valuable colleagues in pursuit of a common goal -- providing a relevant and quality education to all children.

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